

Breaking Down the Abyssinian/Somali Standard

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Introduction

According to the CCCA standard for Abyssinian and Somali cats, the allocation of points is as follows: coat ticking & clarity 15 points, coat colour 15 points, coat texture & length 10 points and condition 5 points. This means aspects of the coat are worth 45 points which is almost half the allocation for the standard. Eye colour is 5 points and I must say I don't think I have seen an Aby with incorrect eye colour although the eyes do vary in richness and depth of colour. The remaining 50 points are really about the structure of the cat: 15 points for the body, 5 for the tail and 5 for the legs & paws, then 15 for the head and neck, 5 points for the ears and 5 points for eye shape.

The standard uses words that are open to interpretation so it is hard to say what is wrong or right. All judges and breeders will have their own opinion about what is moderate, what is medium, what is relative and basically what they think an Aby or Somali should look like.

See the previous issue for:

Part 1 – The Aby Eyes

Part 2 – The Aby Ears

Part 3

The Aby Tail – 5 points

This part of the CCCA Standard is fairly self-explanatory as it describes the Abyssinian tail as being '*thicker at the base, proportionately long and tapering*', declaring '*a whip*' as undesirable. The

description for a Somali tail is '*thicker at the base, proportionately long and tapering, carrying a full, feathery plume*', with the whip being undesirable in a Somali tail too.

Some people check the length of the tail by gently bending the tail back along the length of the body to see if it reaches at least the shoulder blades of the cat. Another method involves passing the hand over the length of the cat's body and tail with the distance travelled feeling the same for the body as the tail (or longer for the tail) resulting in a '*proportionately long*' tail. The tail shouldn't be long and thin for its entire length as this creates a whip-like tail. The only difference for the tail of a Somali is for a '*full feathery plume*', which is created from the longer length fur of the semi-longhair Somali cat.

The markings and colour of the tail are discussed in the Standard under Coat and Colour where it is noted that the tail of a tawny Abyssinian or Somali should be tipped with black. Following on from this the other colours of Abyssinians and Somalis should have a tail tipped in the colour relating to their coat colour. I have never seen an Abyssinian without the coloured tail tip; however, the tips do seem to vary in length. From my observations of Abyssinians in Australia some tails seem to have a more pointed tip while others are rounded; however, there is no indication that one is preferred over the other in the Standard or by judges that I have observed judging Abyssinian cats. Which do breeders prefer or see as being more desirable in the breed?



Photograph 1: Kitten tail with long black tip.



Photograph 2: Kitten tail with shorter black tip.

Penalties

A withhold fault is given if the tail has distinct bars or rings.

In the CCCA Standard, a kink in the tail caused by deformed bones is a general fault in any pedigree show cat. Some kinks may just be felt while others may be visible.



Photograph 3: Visible kink at the end of the tail.

Part 4

The Aby Legs and Paws – 5 points

The Abyssinian legs are described as '*deceptively well-muscled, relatively long and slim*'. To me the word 'deceptively' infers that the extent of the muscle on the legs is not realised until felt; however, I do think that muscle tone is clearly visible on Abyssinian cats. Again, the word 'relatively' is used, this time referring to the leg length so I would interpret that to mean the legs are long in relation to the body so that the legs look longer than the depth of the body. These proportions help to create the overall balance and look of elegance portrayed by the Abyssinian cat.

The paws are '*neat, oval and compact*.' This seems to be true for most Abys I have seen although some males tend to have longer toes than the females so the paws do not look quite as compact (see Photographs 4, 5 & 6).



Photographs 4, 5 & 6:

Left: Front legs of older male kitten showing longer toes.

Middle: Front legs of standing male cat.

Right: Front legs of female cat with very '*neat, oval and compact paws*'.

Other parts of the Standard outline the expected clarity of the legs and paw pad colour. The only penalties stated for legs and paw pad colour relate to these other sections.

Penalties

The presence of distinct bars or rings on the legs of an Abyssinian cat is a withhold fault. I wonder what a judge's interpretation of '*distinct*' would be? Often faint bars can be seen on the inner front and back legs of Abyssinian kittens. If darker bars are evident the kitten will be sold as a pet or may be used in a breeding program but not paraded on the show bench. The colour of the bars on a Tawny cat may vary from black through varying shades of brown, with paler bars tending to blend with the base colour of the fur especially as the kitten gets older and the coat intensifies in colour. Sometimes marks are seen on the outer parts of the legs too.



Photograph 7: Kitten with dark bars on the inner front leg.



Photographs 8 & 9:

Left: Kitten with dark bar remnants on the outer of the front legs.

Right: Kitten with bars on the hind legs.

The paw pad colour should be '*appropriate to and specified in individual coat colours*' with a Tawny Abyssinian having black or brown paw pads (Photographs 10 & 11), a Cinnamon Abyssinian should have pink paw pads (Photograph 12), a Blue Abyssinian's paw pads are blue-mauve (Photograph 13) and the Fawn Abyssinian has rose beige coloured paw pads (Photograph 14).



Photographs 10 & 11: Tawny – black or brown paw pad colour



Photographs 12, 13 & 14: Paw pad colours
Left: Cinnamon – pink
Middle: Blue – mauve-blue
Right: Fawn – rose beige

Right: Fawn – rose beige

Penalties

There is a penalty for odd or incorrect paw pad colour. This may be caused by a genetic fault or an autoimmune response such as mosquito bite hypersensitivity. The most likely but still rare instance would be a Tawny with one pink toe



Photograph 15: Tawny Abyssinian paw pad showing incorrect paw pad colour.

In the Standard, in the section for Coat Pattern, it is noted that *'preference is given to cats unmarked on the undersides, chest and legs'* and *'darker hair colour should extend from between the toes to well up the back of the hind legs, preferably to the hocks, also showing as a solid tip at the extreme end of the tail. The tail is without rings.'*

There has been some discussion in a previous issue of The Abyssinian Breeder magazine about whether or not black hocks should be retained in Tawny Abyssinians and the responses received indicated, in general, that breeders feel hocks are desirable although, in the CCCA Standard, cats are not penalised for lacking them and these days some other standards do not contain any reference to them. The Somali cats seen in Australia seem to retain the hocks more often than the Abyssinian cats. I don't think breeders are actively trying to get rid of them from the cats they breed. The hock markings must be disappearing at the expense of either keeping or reducing some other features in the Abys. Genetically, to what are these features linked? One would think that black hocks may have some connections to agouti/tabby genes and with the Australian Abyssinians of today being relatively free of necklacing and leg bars perhaps the black hocks have

gone with it too. If hocks are classified as desirable but not essential and necklacing and bars are classified as undesirable then having the clarity in the coat would override the need to keep black hocks.

With information about the tail, legs and paws under several different sections in the Standard it makes me wonder how judges allocate points. If there are marks on the legs of an Abyssinian cat are points deducted from the 5 points for 'legs and paws' or from the 15 points for 'coat ticking and clarity' or both? As mentioned previously, my interpretation is that the 5 points are for the structure of the legs and paws and therefore no deduction of points should be made from that section if they are marked, rather the deduction should be made from the allocation of points for 'coat ticking and clarity'.

To be continued...

Bibliography/References

CCCA Official Breed Standard for Abyssinian & Somali – January 2006 edition, at
<http://cccofa.asn.au/stdaby.pdf> and
<http://cccofa.asn.au/stdsomali.pdf>.

Addendum

I made a couple of comments/suggestions to Wendy when she submitted the above article, and in turn she suggested I add them, so here they are:

1. Tail Faults

Note that these are not restricted to kinks. Sometimes the second-last tail vertebra is slightly deformed or thickened; it is possible for this thickening to be vertical, horizontal or both. Tail faults are heritable.

2. Barring, Necklacing and Mackerelling

Back in the 1970s, we would have wept with joy if we had bred kittens which were as clear as those in Wendy's photos 7-9. They are, of course, barred by 2006 standards, but 30 years earlier things looked like this:

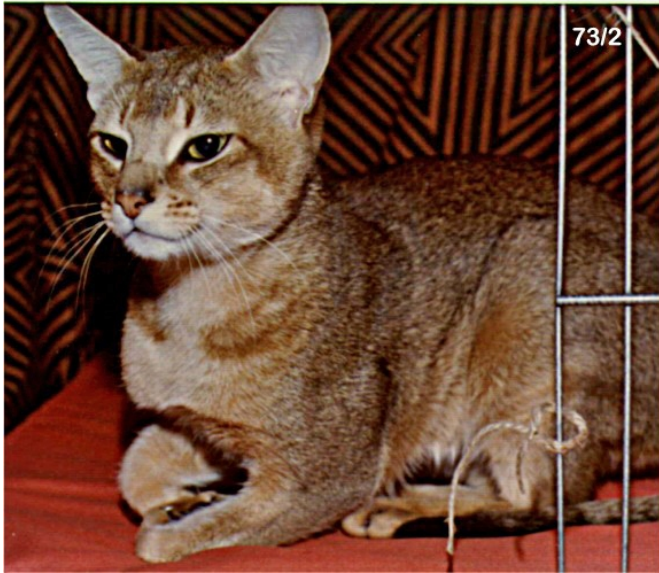


Photo 1 – 1973



Photo 3 – 1976



Photo 2 – 1975

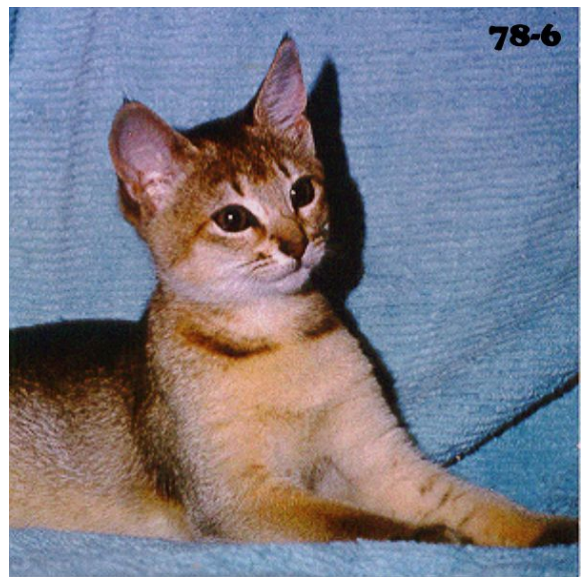


Photo 4 – 1978

The cat in photo 1, despite his necklace, was regarded as quite clear in those days. Moreover, mostly because of his head type and despite his below-par colour, he was NSW Shorthair Cat of the Year in 1973, out of hundreds, including Siamese, Orientals and, of course all females.

The cat in photo 2 was our first brood queen, shown here as a kitten displaying her belly.

The kittens in photo 3 are the first Aby and last Siamese of our breeding. Just look at those leg bars, necklace and large white areas, and ear tufts.

Photo 4 shows a female Aby, regarded as pretty good and reasonably clear, and again, look at those tufts.

As a matter of interest, we didn't see totally clear Abys in Australia until 1977, when Edite Holmberg emigrated from Sweden to Newcastle, NSW, and brought with her the Cinnamon boys, Asterix Elendil and Asterix Faramir.

The next step toward clarity was our importation of a Tawny pair from the US in 1980, also totally clear cats.

George Kennedy

***Coat colour, texture and ticking will be covered in Wendy's article in the next issue,
with Rita Bruche providing the Somali component.***